

The 1988 Gin DBQ

Allow 15 minutes planning time

Suggested writing time--45 minutes

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying Documents 1-13. (Some of the documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise). Write your answers on the lined pages of the pink essay booklet.

This question is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. As you analyze each document, **take into account its source and the point of view of the author**. Write an essay on the following topic that integrates your analysis of the documents. You may refer to historical facts and developments not mentioned in the documents.

1. Analyze the arguments for and against the restriction of the sale of gin in eighteenth century England, and assess the degree to which the issues of the debate were reflected in the following excerpt from the Gin Act of 1751.

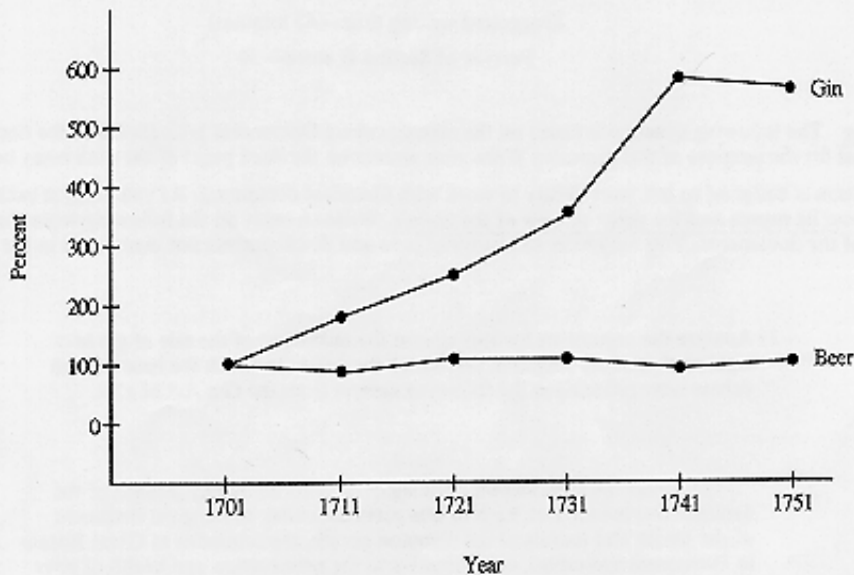
"Whereas the immoderate drinking of distilled liquors by persons of the meanest and lowest sort, hath of late years increase, to the great detriment of the health and morals of the common people, the commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled, ever attentive to the preservation and health of your Majesty's subjects, have taken this great evil into our serious consideration, and proposed such laws and provisions as appear to us to be more likely to put a stop to the same."

From the Preamble of the Gin Act of 1751

Historical Background: After the Glorious Revolution in 1688, gin began to rival beer as the most popular drink in England. In 1689 the English government opened the distilling trade to all English people who paid certain taxes. Over the next sixty years, however, the government regulated the sale of gin with an inconsistent taxation policy. With the Gin Act of 1736, for example, the government imposed a high license fee for gin retailers and a high per-gallon tax; yet, the license fee and the tax were significantly lowered within a few years. Finally the Gin Act of 1751 (a) prohibited gin distillers from selling to unlicensed merchants, (b) restricted retail licenses to substantial property holders, and (c) charged high fees to those merchants eligible for retail licenses.

Document 1

CHANGES IN ENGLISH BEER AND GIN PRODUCTION AS A PERCENT OF THE 1701 PRODUCTION LEVELS



Customs Library, Excise Revenue Accounts, 1701-1751

Document 2

Nothing is more certain than the fact that the ordinary production of grain in England is much greater than our people or cattle can consume. Because gin is made from grain, the distilling trade is one remedy for this disaster as it helps to carry off the great quantity of grain in such a time of plenty. In times of plenty and a moderate price of grain, the distilling of grain is one of the most essential things to support the landed interest and therefore especially to be preserved.

Daniel Defoe, author and social commentator, *Review*, 1713

Document 3

Everyone who now passes through the streets of the great city of London and looks into the gin shops must see, even in shops of creditable and wholesome appearance, a crowd of poor ragged people, cursing and quarreling with one another over repeated glasses of these destructive liquors. In one place not far from East Smithfield, a trader has a large empty room where, as his wretched guests get intoxicated, they are laid together in heaps, men, women and children, until they recover their senses, when they proceed to drink on, or having spent all they had, go out to find the means to return to the same dreadful pursuit.

Anonymous *Distilled Liquors: the Bane of the Nation*, 1736

Document 4

Let us consider, Sir, that the gin trade has been carried on for about 100 years and that it has been very much encouraged by several acts of Parliament. No one could imagine that the trade is in itself detrimental to the health and welfare of the people. Accordingly, great numbers of his Majesty's subjects, especially within the last 40 years, have entered this business. There is not an inn, an alehouse, or a coffeehouse in the kingdom, but what owes a great part of its profits to the sale of gin. there are now multitudes of families in the kingdom who owe their chief if not their only support tot he distilling, or to the sale of such liquor. They deserve the care and the consideration of the British House of Common. I cannot give my consent to any regulation which will put them out of the business to which they owe their chief support.

William Pulteney, landowner, speech in Parliament, 1736

Document 5

This year's Gin Act with its very high license fees strikes at the very root of property rights and is a prelude to a general excise tax at the next session of Parliament.

Letter to John Moore, an important distiller, 1736

Document 6

His Majesty's share of the taxes upon gin has amounted to 70,000 pounds a year for the last eight years. Because the proposed Gin Act of 1736 will raise fees so high that nobody will pay them, His Majesty will lose a yearly revenue of 70,000 pounds. This probable loss ought to be made known to His Majesty.

Speech by a member of Parliament, 1736

Document 7

We have observed:

That the drinking of gin, and other distilled liquors has for some years greatly increased;

That the constant and excessive use thereof has destroyed thousands of his Majesty's subjects;

That great numbers of others have been by its use rendered unfit for useful labour, debauched in morals, and drawn into all manner of vice and wickedness.

County Magistrates from Middlesex, Petition to Parliament, 1736

Document 8

I never heard that a single drink, even of the pernicious liquor called gin, was either a crime or a sin. Whatever some physicians may say, others will tell you that a moderate drink of some sort of liquor is necessary upon many occasions for the relief or support of nature. the cold, damp and often foggy climate of England makes such an aid to nature absolutely necessary.

Lord Bathurst, 1737

Document 9

These liquors not only infatuate the mind but poison the body; they not only fill our streets with madness and our prisons with criminals, but our hospitals with cripples. Those women who riot in this poisonous debauchery are quickly disabled from bearing children or else produce children diseased from their birth.
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Lord Lonsdale, speech in Parliament, 1743

Document 10

There is only one condition required in those who desire into our religious society: a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins. It is expected of all who continue therein, that they should avoid evil of every kind: the taking of the name of God in vain; the profaning the day of the Lord; drunkenness; fighting; quarreling; brawling.
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John Wesley, <i>A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists</i> , 1749
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Document 11

GIN LANE



"Gin, Cursed Fiend, with Fury Fraught..."

William Hogarth, *Gin Lane*, 1751

Document 12

BEER STREET



"Beer, Happy Produce of Our Isle..."

William Hogarth, *Beer Street*, 1750

Document 13

We make ten times the quantity of gin we made forty years ago. The cheapness of gin encourages the poor to drink. If the evil of gin increases in the next ten years as it has done in the last, drunkenness must become the characteristic of the people; they must live upon spirits, and forget labour and sobriety. The children must be born in gin, brought up in a gin shop, live in drunkenness and kick out of the world without having enjoyed one sober thought; but private vices are public benefits, and while they continue such, we have no great hopes of redressing those many calamities that attend national drunkenness.

Excerpt from *The London Tradesman*, 1747